

## READER 2

# Students as AI Citizens

## Are you a user of AI, or someone who can shape it?

Learning to use AI is not the same as learning how to live with AI. You can get very good at writing prompts and still know almost nothing about who built the system, what data or creative work it learned from, what it does with your words, or who sets its rules.

That gap is what this reader is about.

UNESCO - the United Nations agency for education - argues that schools should prepare students to be two things at once: responsible users of AI, and co-creators of it. Not only people who operate the tool. People who help decide what it should be.

## Four things students should learn

Across these four areas, UNESCO identifies 12 competencies - from human agency and accountability to ethics by design, understanding how AI works, defining problems, and improving possible solutions.

1. A human-centered mindset. People build AI. People choose its goals, its data, and its rules. Those choices can grow human freedom or shrink it. So the first question is not what this thing can do. It is what people actually need here.
2. Ethics. AI touches privacy, fairness, safety, culture, work, and the environment. Ethics is not a rule you bolt on after the product ships. It is something you build in from the start - and something you can learn to notice when it is missing.
3. How AI actually works. Data. Algorithms. Models. Training. Prediction. Error. You do not need to be an engineer. You do need to know enough to test a tool and find where it breaks.
4. Design. Good design starts with a problem, not a product. Name the need. Name who is affected. Plan it. Test it. Listen to people. Then improve it - or stop it.

## Three levels of getting there

| LEVEL             | WHAT IT MEANS                                | YOU MIGHT...                                                                 |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Understand</b> | Explain the idea and connect it to real life | Explain how people shaped a chatbot, and name one risk it creates            |
| <b>Apply</b>      | Use what you know in a new situation         | Test a tool, check its answer against a real source, follow the safety rules |
| <b>Create</b>     | Help design tools, rules, or systems         | Write a proposal that protects rights and public value                       |

These are not a ladder you climb once. Trying to create something usually shows you what you never understood.

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# Access is not agency

**A tool being available is not the same as having a say.**

Say your school gives every student an AI homework helper. One gap closes right away: now everyone can get an explanation at eleven at night, not just students whose families can pay a tutor.

That is real. Now ask the next questions.

- Who decided what it should teach?
- Does it help you think, or think for you?
- Where do your questions and your writing go after you type them?
- If it gives a wrong or unfair answer, can anyone challenge it?
- Who owns it, and who earns money when you use it?
- If your school leaves the product, does your work leave with you?

**You have ACCESS when a tool is available to you. You have AGENCY when you can understand it, question it, refuse it, change it, or help build the next one.**

A company or a school can hand you access. Agency takes rights, knowledge, a voice, and real choices.

## From classroom rules to public power

UNESCO describes what students should learn. This lab asks something larger: who should have the power to govern AI in schools?

Governance is the unglamorous word for the rules behind the rules. Who approves a tool. What proof it has to show first. Who watches for harm. How you complain. When something gets shut down.

Students do not need to control every decision. Adults have legal duties to protect young people, and some of this work takes real technical training.

But you know something no vendor, official, or researcher knows: what a tool is actually like to use, in this school, in this class, on your own work. That knowledge cannot be collected from the outside. It has to come from you.

A good system needs all of it - technical skill, public responsibility, teacher judgment, family knowledge, and student experience.

**YOUR TURN: Pick one way AI is used in a school. Would students there be only users, or would they have real agency? Name three things - a piece of information, a right, or a decision - that would move them closer to citizenship.**

Source, checked September 8, 2026: UNESCO, AI Competency Framework for Students (2024; updated online January 16, 2026). This reader simplifies the framework and connects it to this lab's questions about governance and ownership. Read the original for the full version.